

# Report on the Interlibrary Loan Service 2013

## Introduction

The Ministry of Education and Culture commissioned the Finnish Central Library and the National Repository Library to report on the present condition of public libraries. This report focuses on development, responsibilities, interlibrary loan statistics, loans within library consortiums, and the role of the National Repository Library. The most recent previous report on these matters is from the early 1990s.

Compiling information for the report started in early 2012 with interviews and continued in May with a survey by an e-questionnaire sent to public libraries. Writing the report began in early 2013.

This report is structured according to the following thematic entities in the survey:

- Basic information about your library
- Interlibrary loan service and the patron
- The work and processes of the interlibrary loan service
- The future of this service in public libraries
- Statistics
- In your own words

We hope the report leads to concrete results:

- Clear instructions, definitions and recommendations to which all libraries will commit, and software and tools for developing the service.

Alongside the body text of the report, you will find short info boxes to highlight the central points and to liven up the read.

Throughout the report, interlibrary loans and interlibrary loan service are abbreviated as ILL.

**Previous report:**  
"Does the library network work? Report on the public library network"

(Ministry of Education memorandums 1990:51)

## Summary

One interviewee at the Rovaniemi library put it well:

***The interlibrary loan service brings joy to both the patrons and the employees!***

Every day the library employees meet patrons who are pleasantly surprised to hear about the chance to receive their requested materials as an interlibrary loan.

The ILL has been one of the basic library services from the beginning, but its marketing still poses challenges. Even today many patrons hear about it for the first time when they request materials that are not available in their local library collections. This survey shows that libraries understand the importance of marketing, and conduct most of it via their library website, in patron service situations and with brochures. Only 10% of the replying libraries do not market the ILL service in any way.

On a national level, the number of sent and received ILLs has decreased approximately 10%. However, interpreting the statistics is problematic because libraries use varying conventions to compile them, despite instructions to use a uniform method. Confusion is caused by the fact that some libraries include loans within their library consortiums, although our instructions define these as not ILLs. Before we specified this distinction in our instructions, the nationwide number of ILLs was much higher.

	All of Finland 1999	All of Finland 2012
Received interlibrary loans	211 855	185 271
Sent interlibrary loans	202 769	176 655

Interlibrary Loan  
Service is a crucial  
part of library work.

The service needs  
to be marketed.

What is the future of the interlibrary loan service in public libraries? A variety of answers can be extracted from the survey, but all the respondents agreed that it is a service which continues to be needed in the future. The internet and other new sources for materials create also new challenges, as the library is still often the best and the only place where patrons can access books and materials to deepen their knowledge on topics they first came across on the internet or other media.

In the future, locating and retrieving information will be made easier by the joint catalogue **Melinda** which is to be shared by all library sectors, and **Finna**, a search engine which will connect all of the Finnish memory organisations. Both of these systems are at the moment under construction, and public libraries participate with their collections in their development.

The ILL service has increasingly become work where no effort is spared to locate the specific information requested by the patron. The survey revealed that one of the most useful tools for this is **Frank**, a search engine that is able to search several databases at once, covering all of the collections in public, university and polytechnic libraries, as well as some of the special library collections. At the moment Frank is an important tool especially for the public libraries, but it will gradually be replaced by Melinda and Finna as more libraries participate in them.

As a supplier of ILL materials, the National Repository Library was widely praised both in the questionnaire replies and the interviews. For the public libraries, the Repository Library is the fastest and the most cost-efficient source of ILL materials, and they are its most avid users. Out of all the library sectors, the public libraries are the most active users of its book collections. The university libraries, on the other hand, are the biggest user of its article collections.

The ILL service enables the constant movement of library collections – according to the patrons' wishes. ILLs arrive in, and are sent out to various libraries. Conducting the ILL service becomes more difficult if it is not fully compatible with the library management system. This may happen because in the course of time, libraries have developed a number of varying systems to manage their sent and received ILLs. Still, all libraries want ILLs to show up on the borrowers' registry alongside with all the other loans. Indeed, this survey emphasises the need for an ILL management application that would be used by all libraries and work seamlessly with all the library systems.

Interlibrary loan service continues to be needed.

Melinda and Finna!  
New tools for ILL.

Frank searches and locates from the collections of all libraries.

National Repository Library helps all libraries!

The manual card catalogues need to be replaced with an integrated ILL system.

An interlibrary loan travels to the patron through the intermediating library which loans it to the patron, and sends it back to its home library when the patron returns it. The present system works, but from the patron's point of view it may sometimes seem a bit clumsy compared with all the online bookstores. Many libraries wish something could be done to this. For example, the patron should be offered a chance to order the ILL directly from the library where they find the requested material. However, before this is possible, we need a solution for identifying the patron and ensuring the return of the materials in due time.

The patron needs to be given an option of ordering the ILL directly from the library of their choice.

## Conducting the interlibrary loan service report: E-questionnaire and the interviews

The survey was aimed at all public libraries and conducted in May 2012. The libraries were informed of the survey beforehand and the web address of the questionnaire was sent to 336 libraries.

A total of 36 questions was divided into six themes as follows:

- Basic information about your library (5)
- The ILL service and the patron (6)
- The work processes of the ILL service (11)
- The future of this service in public libraries (9)
- Statistics (4)
- In your own words (1)

The results of the survey were analysed using answers from 153 libraries. All in all, we received slightly more replies, but for various reasons they were so incomplete that they had to be left out. Some of the problems were caused by connection issues with the e-questionnaire application.

In addition to this, interviews were conducted at eight libraries:

- Before the survey:  
Kotka, Lappeenranta, Mikkeli, Lieksa, Oulu and Vaasa
- After the survey:  
Seinäjoki and Rovaniemi

The libraries were not asked to prepare for the interviews, as they were carried out by discussing all matters connected with the ILL service. These pre-survey interviews were used as the basis for drafting the e-questionnaire. After the survey we interviewed two libraries, and went through their answers to the e-questionnaire, asking about any possible changes since the survey.

The survey was sent to all public libraries.

Answers from 153 libraries are included in the analysis.

Interviews were conducted in eight libraries before and after the survey.

## The interlibrary loan service and the patron

### **E-questionnaire:**

#### **How does the patron make the interlibrary loan request?**

The easiest way is to visit the library personally. This is the most popular option.

If the patron phones a library, depending on the case, they will either be able to carry out the ILL request from start to finish, or they may be asked to fill the ILL request form online, or to visit the library.

The number of patrons using the online ILL request forms grows all the time. 60% of the libraries participating in the survey offered a web form for ILL requests.

Email is still the most popular way to carry out an ILL request, even if a web form is available.

#### **ILL request can be made by**

- Visiting the library
- Phone
- Web form
- Email

### **E-questionnaire:**

#### **How is the patron notified of an arrived interlibrary loan?**

The most popular way to notify patrons of an arrived ILL is by email. Only less than 10% of the libraries use some other method.

The patron may also be notified by phone, depending on the case.

Using SMS notifications is becoming more popular. 78,4% of the replying libraries use it alongside, or as an alternative to email.

Regular mail is used less and less to send notifications. Only 28,1% of the replying libraries still considered it a viable option. On the other hand, all libraries use regular mail if the patron cannot otherwise be reached.

#### **The patron receives notification of an arrived ILL by:**

- Email
- Phone
- SMS
- Regular mail

**E-questionnaire:**

**What is the basic fee that a patron pays for the interlibrary loan?**

The fees related to ILLs vary from library to another. The interviews and e-questionnaire showed that while some libraries wish the service could be made free for the patrons, an even greater number are in favour of fees for the service to avoid unnecessary requests and other issues.

However, the libraries were almost unanimously in favour of standardising the fees at all public libraries.

This question was answered by 153 libraries and their ILL fees varied as follows:

Free	10 libraries
1 euro	14 libraries
2 euros	34 libraries
3 euros	13 libraries
4 euros	25 libraries
5 euros	28 libraries
varied	29 libraries

In 29 libraries the basic fee varies. For example students pay a lower fee.

**Recommendation!**

The ILL fees should be the same at all public libraries.

**E-questionnaire:**

**If the sending library charges a fee for delivering the requested interlibrary loan material, does the patron pay this + the basic fee?**

When the Act on Criteria for Charges Payable to the State (1993, act 150/92) came into effect, the university libraries had to implement delivery fees. This significantly increased the costs of the service for the public libraries.

The interviews revealed that the patrons may often even cancel their ILL requests when they learn about its costs. In some cases, it may even be cheaper to purchase the materials than to request it as an interlibrary loan.

Half of the libraries answering the survey charged the patrons either no fees at all, or only the basic fee, even when the library itself had to pay the full delivery fee for materials arriving from university libraries.

The situation is similar also if the materials are requested from abroad through the Central Library. At the time of writing, the fees for foreign ILLs through the Central Library can be as high as 30 euros per loan.

Fees for ILLs from university or overseas libraries are high.

It is up to the the patron to decide if they want the ILL delivered.

**E-questionnaire:  
What kind of interlibrary materials do the patrons request?**

At this question, the libraries could name more than one type of material.

Books	85 %
Audio materials	63 %
Copies of articles	52 %
Films	40 %
Theses	33 %
Microfilms	23 %
Language courses	11 %

The results are hardly surprising. Books are the most popular ILL materials, but audio materials are not far behind. Article copies come in as third most requested materials.

The answers would have been more revealing if the question had asked to specify, for example, how the books or audio materials are divided by subjects. Unfortunately, this was not possible as many libraries do not compile statistics at this specificity.

However, considering the number of available materials via television, internet and video rental shops, the amount of requested films is surprising.

## The work and the processes of the interlibrary loan service

**E-questionnaire:  
The LibraryWiki (KirjastoWiki) includes a “Manual for interlibrary service” that is maintained by The Finnish Research Library Association. Do you need it in your work?**

The employees at public libraries are aware of the manual, but they rarely need it in their everyday work. It has proved most useful in more complex ILL service situations.

138 libraries replied to this question. They needed the manual in their work as follows:

- 1 % often
- 36 % sometimes
- 63 % never

The manual for interlibrary service can be found at the Finnish LibraryWiki - [Link](#)

**E-questionnaire:**

**Estimate how much time does your library use to take care of the interlibrary service. Give the estimate in hours/week.**

The time used per week is based on the libraries' own estimate. This estimate is complicated by the fact that at least in smaller libraries everyone who works at the ILL service does also some other type of library work.

- At larger libraries (mostly regional libraries) the time used for ILL service is 20–60 hours per week.
- At smaller libraries the time used is 0–1 hours per week.
- The average time used is 5–10 hours per week.

It would be useful and interesting to see how many man-years the public libraries use on the ILL service on a yearly basis. This survey permits only a rudimentary estimate of it being somewhere between 25 and 30 man-years.



## E-questionnaire:

### Does your library restrict the interlibrary loans in any way?

As all of the interviewed libraries see it, the varying policies, fees and restrictions hamper operating the ILL service. It is often difficult to explain these varying systems to the patrons, and the libraries wish the policies could be standardised.

#### No restrictions

- **18 %** of the libraries have no restrictions with regard to ILLs

#### Restrictions

- **26 %** of the libraries do not give materials marked as short loans to be lent out as ILLs
- **25 %** of the libraries lend materials from their local materials collection to other libraries only for reading room use
- **24 %** of the libraries do not lend materials from their local materials collection to other libraries at all
- **11 %** of the libraries do not lend materials from their new acquisitions to other libraries
- **6 %** of the libraries do not lend their microfilm materials to other libraries
- **5 %** of the libraries do not give their course book materials as ILLs
- **5 %** of the libraries do not give materials as an ILL if the requesting library has the same material in their own collection

#### Answer option "Other"

- **14 %** of the libraries chose this option and listed restrictions such as:
  - Materials are not lent to another library when the regional library has the material available
  - Reference library materials
  - Valuable collections
  - Console games

#### Instructions

The libraries wish to see common instructions, especially on the interlibrary lending of course books and recently acquired materials. With regard to these materials, there are great differences from one library to another.

There should be no restrictions on the interlibrary lending of course books and recently acquired materials.

Materials can be requested as ILLs if they are out on a loan at the patron's local library.

The library must not refuse the ILL request on the basis that the requesting library has the same material in its own collections.

### E-questionnaire:

#### How does your library send the interlibrary loan materials to the requesting library?

The Finnish postal service (Itella) is the most used method of sending ILL materials, and it is also used to return them to the lending library. Library consortiums and regional collaboration have led to cooperation also in transportation, and this facilitates the mobility of materials, also interlibrary loans.

According to the survey:

- **77 %** of the libraries mostly use the postal service (Itella) to transport the materials to the requesting library.
- **18 %** of the libraries chose the option “other,” including regional and joint transportations for interlibrary transportation. Also mobile libraries are used, and in one case the ILL materials travel with one employee who happens to live and work in different municipalities.
- **3 %** of the libraries use Matkahuolto freight services to transport ILL materials.

In Lapland the patron receives the requested materials via the **Rekku** system

Central Finland uses **Kepri**, a joint library transport system

In Northern Ostrobothnia the **Outi** and **Tiekkö** libraries have their own joint transportation system

The Helsinki metropolitan area uses their own **HelMet** transportation

### **E-questionnaire:**

**What libraries or other places do you use the most when requesting an interlibrary loan? Choose 1–5 most popular!**

The interviews revealed that for various reasons, the libraries end up favouring some places as sources for the materials. This may not always be the library geographically closest to the requesting library.

The favourite sources for ILL materials all have web library systems where other libraries can easily request materials, and their deliveries are fast. The National Repository Library is the fastest option, delivering materials often already on the day following the request. If the requested materials are available at several places and the Repository Library is one of them, it will be the requesting libraries' choice because of its speed and free deliveries.

#### Receivers of ILL requests:

- **81 %** Regional libraries
- **80 %** National Repository Library
- **76 %** University libraries
- **31 %** Some library consortium
- **30 %** Vocational high school libraries
- **20 %** Central Library
- **11 %** Special libraries
- **10 %** Archives
- **3 %** Libraries abroad

The 20 % share of the Central Library needs to be taken with a grain of salt since it does not have a collection of its own – in practise the Central Library collection means the HelMet database, and in the table HelMet is also a part of the section “some library consortium.”

The Central Library ILL service is important to other libraries when the requested materials have very limited availability or they need to be ordered from a foreign library.

**E-questionnaire:**

**Which domestic information sources do you use the most when you are locating materials for the interlibrary loan service?**

Libraries use a variety of sources and databases to search and locate the requested materials. The search process starts at the joint databases, which then lead to a specific database where the request can be made.

So far the most used Finnish search engine is **Frank** but it will be replaced by **Melinda** and **Finna**. The table below does not show Finna yet because it was opened for public use only six months after this survey was conducted.

The libraries use domestic databases to locate ILL materials in the following way:

- **82 %** Frank metasearch
- **71 %** Vaari – Repository Library database
- **69 %** Melinda, (this used to be called Linda)
- **21 %** Vocational high school library databases
- **10 %** Nelli
- **8 %** Special library databases
- **8 %** Others, e.g. HelMet and Piki databases

The fact that large joint databases like HelMet and Piki do not seem to be used much (only 8%), is mostly explained by the fact that libraries begin their searches usually at the joint catalogue.

**E-questionnaire:**

**Which international sources do you use at the interlibrary loan service?**

The libraries order a lot of material from the Swedish **Libris** which is freely available online. To request materials, the libraries need to have completed a user agreement with them, but after this the requested materials are delivered to the libraries for free. Materials from other foreign databases are practically always requested via the Central Library.

Foreign and international sources of information that libraries use as an aid in searching or requesting ILLs:

- 59 % Google
- 37 % Libris (Sweden)
- 26 % Wikipedia
- 22 % Amazon
- 15 % British Library
- 11 % BibSys, Sambok (Norway)
- 10 % GoogleBooks
- 7 % Bibliotek.dk (Denmark)
- 4 % GBV, KVK (Germany)
- 4 % Other, including Google Scholar
- 3 % WorldCat
- 1 % Facebook
- 1 % SUBITO Document Delivery

It should be noted that Google, Amazon and Wikipedia are already widely used at the ILL service. The next tools to assist in the service will most likely be Facebook and Twitter. One of the interviewed libraries suggested setting up a Facebook group for librarians working with ILLs. This could become a joint forum for discussion and a source for tips on searching and locating materials.

**E-questionnaire:**

**How does your library market the interlibrary loan service?**

Compared with the commercial sector, information publicity and marketing at libraries is still in its infancy. Libraries acknowledge the importance of marketing but are still timid about putting this awareness into action.

The question on marketing was answered by 71.6 % of the libraries.

The libraries market the ILL service as follows:

- **15 libraries:**  
No marketing, "There's no need to market, the patrons are aware of the service."
- **56 libraries:**  
Library website
- **28 libraries:**  
During patron service at the lending desk. If the requested materials cannot be found in the library collections, an ILL is recommended.
- **27 libraries:**  
Library brochures
- **7 libraries:**  
Library rules

Individual ways of marketing:

- Website aimed at teaching library use
- Adult education centre curriculum
- Service fee catalogue
- Together with the library consortium
- Student groups

## **E-questionnaire:**

### **Does your library use some interlibrary service software?**

Library systems can be used to send ILLs to another library by lending them the materials. The most central use of ILL software is to enable processing and lending the received ILL materials to the patrons.

63.1 % of the libraries do not use any ILL software, so they take care of it via manual catalogues.

One third of the libraries use some database-based ILL software. Nearly all of these have one crucial flaw: they are not compatible with the lending and borrower registries of the library systems. Because of this the libraries have to use a manual catalogue to keep track of lending the ILL materials out to the patrons.

- The most popular ILL software is Kake, which was developed by the Oulu university library and has been used by libraries for several years. A new web version of Kake, WebKake was released in 2013.
- A few libraries use software called Olka.
- Axiell Libra includes a separate ILL service module.
- Fredrika libraries run the ILL service through their own intranet.
- One library simply uses the Excel spreadsheet application to manage their ILLs.

The questionnaire included an additional question about the need for a modern ILL software. Half of the answering libraries feel there is a need for an application that would be fully compatible with the library systems. On the other hand, smaller libraries seem to be fairly happy with the current applications. One fourth of the libraries did not answer this question at all, which tells something about the relative contentment with the present situation.

However, all of the interviewed libraries stressed the importance of developing a commonly-used interlibrary software.

### **WebKake**

The solution to manage the ILLs at public libraries?

### **Proposal / Action:**

The Council for Public Libraries founds a team to develop an ILL application that will be used by all library systems.

Funding for this is applied from the Ministry of Education and Culture.

# The future of interlibrary loan service in public libraries

## E-questionnaire:

**According to the International Library Standard ISO 2789 (2006(E);3.3.11), interlibrary service involves delivering a physical copy of a document as a whole, or a part of it as a photocopy, into a library governed by another administrative unit. An interlibrary document can also be a copy. However, an interlibrary document cannot be transferred to a patron in electronic form. What do you think about this?**

This question was answered by 114 libraries. Almost unanimously they considered this library standard outdated. The definition of ILL service itself was generally accepted, but the final sentence which prohibits the electronic transfer of the document to the patron, was widely criticised. One answer commented:

“The definition of ILL service sounds ok, but prohibiting electronic transfer significantly slows down the service. And it also forces the patron to needlessly run from one place to another. Often the materials requested are only small articles, or e.g. obituaries. Allowing electronic transfer would also save paper, making the service more environmentally friendly.”

The Finnish copyright law makes it impossible to electronically transfer e.g. scanned materials to the patron without a separate agreement.

## A selection of comments from the libraries:

“The standard is especially outdated with regard to articles. In this day and age, it should be possible to do this electronically. This would speed up the work at both the sending and receiving libraries.”

“I don’t understand the prohibition of electronic transfer. The patron can transfer any materials to their computer anyway, and this leads to the same end result.”

“The definition of ILL service sounds ok, but prohibiting the electronic transfer significantly slows down the service. And it also forces the patron to needlessly run from one place to another. Often the materials requested are only small articles, or e.g. obituaries. Allowing electronic transfer would also save paper, making the service more environmentally friendly.”



## **E-questionnaire:**

### **How would you define interlibrary service?**

The manual for interlibrary loan service defines it as follows:

- Interlibrary loan service is a part of the library collection policy.
- The service involves requesting materials that cannot be found in the patron's local library collections.
- The request is made by the library. In the future the request can also be made directly by the patron.
- In the future, if a request is made for materials that can be found in the patron's local library collection but are currently out on a loan, the patron should be notified of the option to make an interlibrary loan request, or they could request the materials themselves.

The libraries were asked to give a definition of what ILL service is about, in their own words. We received 85 answers.

All public libraries have a fairly similar view of the ILL service. To sum up: The patron is important and must receive the requested materials in spite of where they live. Additionally, the patron should not have to navigate confusing rules that are difficult to understand and may vary from one library to another.

The "sent and received interlibrary loans" in the national statistics database cannot be reliably analysed because the collected statistics are not based on a uniform definition of what constitutes an ILL. The major source of confusion is the way some libraries include in their statistics the loans within their library consortium, while others do not. One reply noted: "The concept needs to be redefined. Loans within the consortium are not ILLs, we call them regional loans."

Public libraries need uniform guidelines for the ILL service. These should include concrete rules and regulations on how to unify the principles of the ILL service. The comments show that libraries want to commit to common courses of action.

### **A comment that reveals a sense of threat and fear:**

"Interlibrary service means requesting materials from other libraries if they cannot be found in your own library.

If we deviate from this, it will be difficult to decide when materials should be requested and when not. This would lead to a situation where an ILL request should always be made if your own library materials are out on a loan, or when the patron so demands.

This would be difficult to interpret.

The problem is the patrons who have already made a reservation for materials requested by someone else. Their rights must not be trampled upon.

On the other hand, we might also perpetually become the sending party, and be forced to send our few copies to other libraries if they have more demand for them than they have copies.

If we could agree on clear common rules, we could be more flexible and it would improve the patron service. It is difficult to explain to the patrons or even your co-workers why the existing regulations on ILL service have to be adhered to, if we also complain that they are out of date.

## **E-questionnaire:**

### **What is your view on the roles of the National Repository Library, the Central Library and the regional libraries in relation to the public library interlibrary service?**

The National Repository Library and the regional libraries stood out in the answers. The Central Library is seen as important mainly when the ILL needs to be requested from abroad.

#### **Central Library interlibrary service**

The motto of the ILL service has already for long been “faster, more comprehensively and more economically”.

When the Central Library started in 1981, one of its essential functions was to be a centre for the ILL service. This required a versatile collection and adequate tools to manage the task. At that point, a large part of its processed requests consisted of intermediating the ILL requests to libraries abroad. Nowadays most regional libraries have their own ILL agreements with libraries in Sweden and Norway, significantly diminishing the intermediary role of the Central Library. In addition to Sweden and Norway, they intermediate ILLs from Denmark and Germany, and some from England. Requests to other European libraries are only rarely sent.

The Multilingual Library rotating collection has become one of the most important aspects of the Central Library ILL service. Today it provides 65% of the ILLs requested from the Central Library.

Nowadays the Helsinki City Library, the central library for public libraries, takes care of the ILLs sent from the Helsinki metropolitan area. Other Finnish libraries make their ILL requests via the HelMet web library, and they concentrate mostly on materials in Helsinki, although the materials in other cities are equally available. The regional transportation has been streamlined, but there may still be some delay before the requested book, DVD, or other material has arrived at the interlibrary service and can be forwarded to the requesting library.

#### **Repository Library interlibrary service**

The National Repository Library operates on clear principles: It receives and stores materials sent from Finnish libraries and makes them available to the users. Transferring materials to the Repository Library has reduced the need for space in libraries. In addition to being more cost effective, centralised storage ensures that materials remain available to researchers and other patrons who may need them.

**“Repository Library is THE BEST: it’s fast, free and has a large collection.”**

“The Central Library is useful as the ‘shared library’ of the public and research libraries. It is a source for information on many things.”

“The role of regional libraries has changed. Even small libraries now make their ILL requests independently. However, the Central Library still provides valuable assistance on the more complex interlibrary requests.”

“At least for us, the Repository Library is an irreplaceable resource. There you can request many kinds of materials that you don’t usually find in the regional libraries.”

“The Central Library is important to us especially with regard to audio materials. We also sometimes use their intermediary services to request materials from abroad.”

“Usually, for the basic requests, you don’t need to look further than the regional libraries. However, when the requested material is a book, I always check the situation in the Repository Library first.”

<p>In 2012 the ILL service in the Repository Library was maintained and the materials were delivered within 24 hours of receiving the request. The total number of requests was somewhat lower than the previous year, being now slightly over 79 000, 45 % of it copies and 55 % loans. This figure includes also loan renewals. The public libraries' share of the loans has gradually increased. In 2012 it was already 60 %.</p> <p>Most (approximately 80 %) of the copies go to research library patrons. Repository Library is used the least by the vocational high school libraries, sending only 7 % of the requests in 2012.</p>	
<p><b>E-questionnaire:</b>  <b>Do you think that the interlibrary service is gradually disappearing from public libraries?</b></p> <p>This question received plenty of attention. Only 10 % left it unanswered. As the libraries see it, the ILL service is not on the decline. On the contrary, it is seen as even more important than before. The internet offers a wide variety of information on just about anything, but when people get interested in a specific topic, physical library is still the place to find the books, maps and other materials that offer more detailed information.</p> <p>Only a few libraries doubted the future of the ILL service. The libraries noted that as there are now more library consortiums, the amount of ILL requests is no more on the rise. According to the statistics, the amount of sent and received ILLs during 1999–2011 has remained the same on the national level.</p>	<p>“I think that the interlibrary loan service will be needed as long as the libraries cannot afford to acquire all materials themselves.”</p> <p>“Especially for students and researchers, it is an important way of getting their hands on the materials they need.”</p> <p>“No. Just the opposite. There is more demand because people search ever more varied information (reference info and proper information sources) which is more easily available online.”</p> <p>“Absolutely not! Here in the countryside we have a lot of adult students who are avid users of the ILL service. It would also be good to limit the cost of the ILLs from university, vocational high school and special libraries if they cannot be made completely free. The fees force us to restrict our amount of interlibrary requests.”</p>

**E-questionnaire:**

**The national metadatabase, i.e. the joint catalogue is on its way. How would you say it affects the interlibrary loan service?**

After the survey was conducted, the metadatabase has been christened Melinda.

Melinda will become a joint cataloguing and description platform for all libraries. From there individual libraries can transport the information needed to their own library system. Melinda can be operated also via the Finna user interface.

Public libraries have a positive view on developing Melinda, and all public libraries will gradually be linked to the joint catalogue.

The positive attitude can be seen also in the way the libraries reply. For this question we received 104 replies.

**A selection of comments:**

“Linda and Frank are good and adequate joint databases, but a joint catalogue is a step forward.”

”The joint catalogue is bound to make the ILL work easier. It may also increase its popularity if the patrons learn to independently search for materials from the catalogue. Giving information about the service is crucially important.”

“It would make things so much easier! Although Frank is already pretty good, I’m hoping the new joint catalogue will be even easier to search for materials, their availability and reservation data.”

"It will be great if there really will be a comprehensive joint catalogue which covers 90% of the libraries. This is something we've been needing since public libraries began the ILL service.”

**E-questionnaire:**

**NDK, the National Digital Library is also currently being compiled. How do you think it will affect the interlibrary loan service?**

NDL is a joint online service project in which all Finnish memory organisations participate. It allows access to all archival, library and museum materials. The service user interface is called Finna.

Public libraries have participated in the development of the NDL in its executive and expert teams and workgroups from the beginning. HelMet and Vaski libraries have pilot-tested the patron interface and its implementation.

The public libraries have a somewhat distant relationship with the NDL and its user interface Finna because more emphasis has been placed on the university libraries during the development process. This question was answered by 97 libraries. Most of the comments take the form of "hard to say" or "I don't really know."

**A selection of comments:**

"Hard to say" (33)

"It may decrease the need for the ILL service, depending on copyright matters."

"NDL may also increase the demand for interlibrary services as people get interested in new things and find reference info through the NDL. On the other hand, it may decrease the demand for the service as more materials are digitised to be directly used via the NDL."

"NDL may become a good addition to the interlibrary services, if everybody has equal rights of access to it."

"It may decrease the ILL requests for non-fiction books, but it will hardly affect the requests for fiction. It'll also make searches easier."

**E-questionnaire:**

**Considering ebooks, do you think they can be given out as interlibrary loans, and if so, how would you organise it?**

Ebooks are only now entering the host of services offered by public libraries. In terms of lending, ebooks are significantly different from physical books that libraries have been able to freely lend out to the patrons for a long time. Ebooks are not actually lent out as such, but instead they can be downloaded or streamed on the patron's own computer or e-reader. This is made legal by the right to use that a patron receives with their library card.

It may have been still too early to ask this question, but some of the respondents were nevertheless able to envision how ebooks might be lent from one library to another – even if they had no personal experience with them.

One library was of the opinion that “absolutely, interlibrary loans of ebooks are possible”: “To restrict copying, I'd ‘burn’ the patron's information on the lent materials, so that the source of possible illegal copies could easily be tracked down.” Another library suggested that the ebook be copied on a memory stick which can then be lent out. The answers show that there is still a lack of familiarity with ebooks, their use and the related technology. This is understandable, as these things are only now being negotiated with publishers and copyright instances.

We received 99 answers for this question. Many of them included a mention that they have no experience of ebooks in a library.

**A suggestion worth considering:**

“It would maybe be easier if the ebooks were available via the joint catalogue. If ebooks were given out on interlibrary loan, the easiest way to do this would be without the local library acting as an intermediary. The local library could search the ebook for the patron, but the patron could then independently download it for their use.”

“It's hard to imagine how it would work. Maybe individual libraries or consortiums shouldn't buy their own ebooks. Instead, they should build a national ebook library service. All local libraries and their patrons could then join this. This would result in a national ebook library which any patron living anywhere in the country could access to borrow an ebook. When the ebook would be returned, someone from a completely different part of Finland could then borrow it. All municipalities could chip in on the costs of acquisition, and to hire a couple of people to take care of the service. They could be physically stationed in the Central Library, for example.”



**E-questionnaire:**

**What is your opinion on the idea that the patron would independently contact any public library, and request an interlibrary loan which would then be directly mailed to them or sent as a copy? Or do you think that we will continue to need the library (where the patron holds a library card) as an intermediary so that the patron can be properly identified and the loan can be registered? How would the patron return an interlibrary loan they have received directly by mail?**

This question received varied answers, 114 altogether.

Many libraries were of the opinion that the patrons could independently contact the library where they find their requested materials. This in spite of the fact that it might increase the number of lost materials when the patrons fail to return the ILLs.

The libraries in favour of the current ILL system emphasised the fact that to ensure the patrons' legal rights, an intermediary library is needed so that the patrons can return the materials there.

The online book stores have showed that it is possible to conveniently order and pay for a product, and then later receive it in the mail. Compared with this, the interlibrary loan service may seem rigid and old-fashioned.

What should be done? Should we continue as we always have, or radically dismantle the current system and rebuild it to fit the world we now live in? The only way forward is by trying out new things. Pilot libraries should not be hard to find.

**Proposal / Action:**

A pilot project with a few libraries, funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture, to test how the interlibrary service can be made to work directly between the patron and the sending library.

Along with this, we could look into Itella's new postal services to see if some of them might be usable for transporting ILLs.

"Tracking down the material might be easier when another library acts as an intermediary."

"We haven't properly thought about this. It does seem a bit strange that in this age of online stores and businesses, the ILL materials still need to be requested and picked up at the patron's local library. How about a return envelope/bag that the patron would receive with the ILL materials? We would still have to somehow charge the patron for this service, maybe via online payment options at the web library? It's interesting to think about this, and I believe we're going to find a solution at some point. I don't think it's impossible to make it work, as long as there is a common will to do so."

"It would work. You'd receive the book by a cash-on-delivery system. This would ensure the library expenses are covered. We ask for the patrons' addresses and phone numbers anyway. The patron would return the book by mail, and the library could then pick up the delivery at the post office."

"If the patrons get registered on some general registry, e.g. using their online bank accounts, there's no reason why the books couldn't be directly mailed to them. Returns could then be done through the patrons' local libraries or by mail."

## E-questionnaire:

**Should the interlibrary loan service be free of charge to the patrons? Why are you in favour of keeping or removing the patron fees for the interlibrary service?**

### The fees of interlibrary service (111 answers)

- 69.4 % are in favour of retaining the fees
- 16.2 % are in favour of making the service free
- 14.4 % had no opinion on the matter

Majority of the answering libraries were in favour of charging a fee for the ILL service. However, they all agree that the fee needs to be moderate, around one or two euros. This does not cover all of the expenses, but the patron should not be punished for the fact that their local library collection may not have what they need. The libraries agreed that the most important reason for charging the fees is to avoid unnecessary requests, and to make sure the patrons pick up the materials they have requested.

The libraries in favour of a free service viewed the matter in the light of all citizens receiving equal access to information sources, regardless of where they live. Another reason was that it is not the patron's fault if the materials they need have not been selected into their local library collections.

Some of the answers saw it as a twofold matter. In principle they were in favour of a free service, but taking into account for example the financial situation of a given municipality, they acknowledged that this may never become a reality.

"We should keep charging a fee for the interlibrary service because that way it will be used only by those who appreciate the special services they can receive at the library. The fee also makes the ILL materials less likely to be abused."

"I'm in favour of making the service free for all. If the library collections lack something, the library should then get this as an ILL. At our library the regional transportations make the cost of an ILL so low that it's even more sensible to make the service free."

"I have no clear preference on the matter. Having a free service would make sense as many libraries have had to cut down on the number of new acquisitions for financial reasons. This leads to inequality among the patrons when some of the material is free and some isn't. On the other hand, since there are delivery fees within the library consortiums and reservation fees in the library, a fee for the interlibrary service follows the same logic. It's then a different matter how large the fee should be."



# Statistics

## Interlibrary loan statistics:

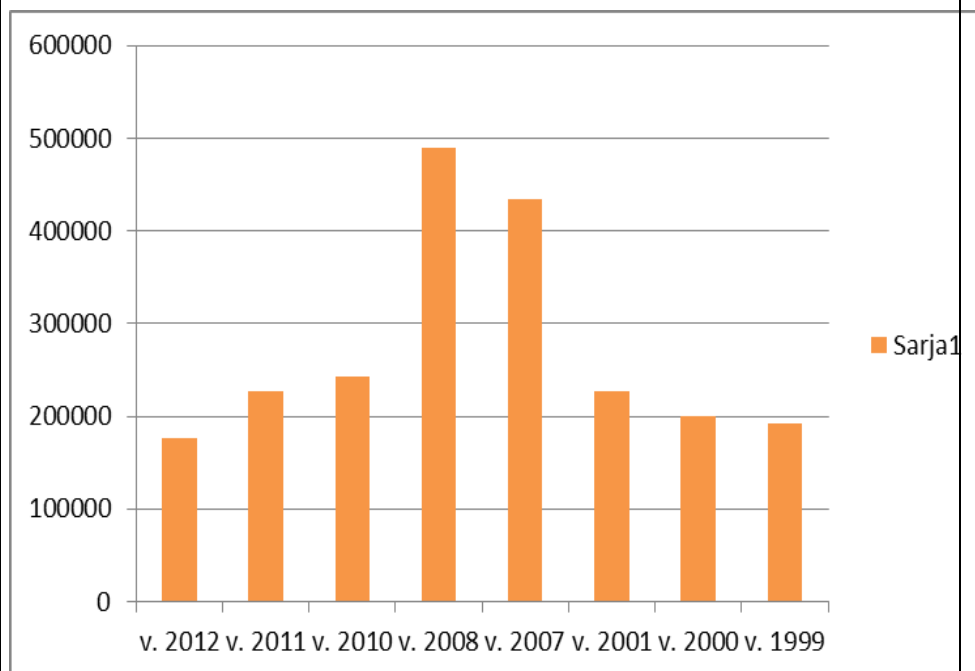
### All of Finland, provincial regions, regional libraries, individual libraries

All libraries enter their yearly numbers of sent and received interlibrary loans into the public library statistics database. The database search tool can compare these on a yearly basis, and against the ratio of received ILLs per 1 000 residents within a given municipality. The information has been compiled in the database since 1999.

- <http://tilastot.kirjastot.fi/en-GB/>

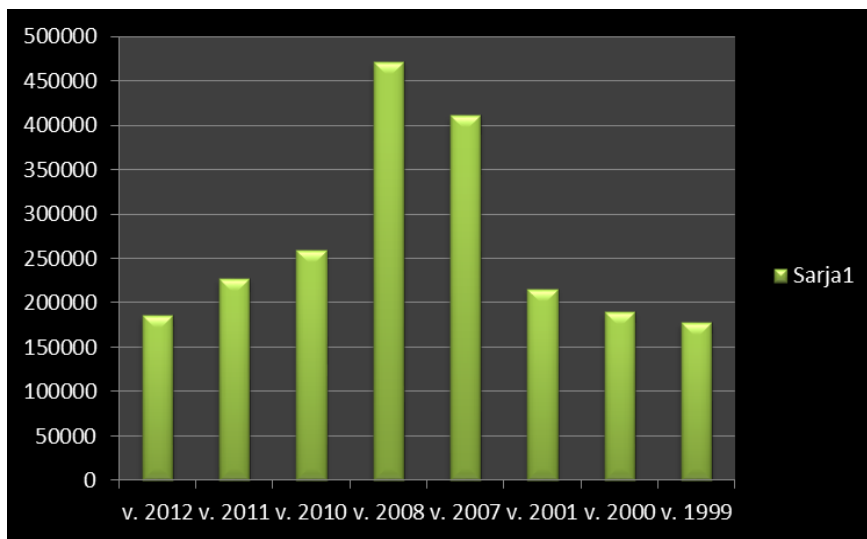
On the level of all Finland, the number of sent ILLs has decreased during the last 13 years. Their number was significantly larger when libraries counted also the loans within their library consortiums as ILLs.

Figure: Sent interlibrary loans 1999 – 2012 / All of Finland



Year	Sent ILLs
2012	176655
2011	227254
2010	243272
2008	488893
2007	434571
2001	226245
2000	200000
1999	192155

Figure: Received interlibrary loans 1999 – 2012 / All of Finland



v. 2012	185271
v. 2011	227064
v. 2010	259649
v. 2008	471095
v. 2007	411332
v. 2001	215501
v. 2000	189446
v. 1999	177459

## In your own words

### E-questionnaire:

**To end this lengthy survey, please tell us anything else that you might have in mind with regard to the interlibrary loan service. The floor is yours!**

This final question was answered by 76 libraries. Many revisited some of the matters asked in the previous questions.

- The libraries wish there was a common ILL application that was compatible with all library systems.
- Frank is considered good, but its search features need to be improved. E.g. it could show directly if the sought item is out on a loan.
- Interlibrary service should be made free, or it should at least have reasonably low fees that are the same in all libraries.
- Requesting ILLs from university libraries should be cheaper.
- The definition of an interlibrary loan needs to be clarified: should regional and consortium loans be considered as ILLs or not?
- The ILL service is viewed as a function common to all libraries, and there is a wish that all libraries should also implement it in a similar way, with as little restrictions on loans as possible.

### This serves as a nice closing comment:

“I’ve been working at the interlibrary loan service for 20 years now, and it’s been good. It’s patron service at its best. Along the way, I’ve gathered a good understanding of the collections at different libraries, from special libraries to libraries abroad. The new materials and other development do bring new challenges, but there is still need for this service in public libraries. It was nice to answer this survey, and doing so, I started thinking about the current state of the interlibrary service myself.”

# Proposals for action and recommendations

## **The interlibrary loan service application**

### **Proposal:**

The Council for Public Libraries founds a team to develop an interlibrary service application for the public libraries. The application can be based on some existing system, or it can be developed from scratch, but it needs to be compatible with the web-based library systems.

### **Funding:**

Special funding for the project will be applied from the Ministry of Education and Culture in autumn 2013

## **Interlibrary service directly to the patron**

### **Proposal:**

As a continuation of earlier trial runs, we should look into new ways of delivering the ILL materials that the patrons have located themselves in the library database. The loans could be delivered e.g. by the Itella Smart mail system. There are now also new methods for identifying the patrons, for example via their online bank identification systems.

### **Funding:**

The Central Library applies for funding together with the pilot libraries from the Ministry of Education and Culture in autumn 2013.

## **Consortium and regional loans**

### **Proposal:**

Consortium and regional loans should not be considered as interlibrary loans.

### **Action:**

The Ministry of Education and Culture briefs and obligates all libraries to use a uniform way to compile statistics on their yearly sent and received ILLs.